

REPERTORY PLAYS N°36

The Market- Money



STEWART ORR

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

LONDON & GLASGOW. GOWANS & GRAY LTD.

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REPERTORY PLAYS, No. 36

THE MARKET-MONEY

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THE MARKET-MONEY

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

GOWANS & GRAY, LTD., LONDON AND GLASGOW
LEROY PHILLIPS, BOSTON, U.S.A.

1923

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UPB

CHARACTERS

INSPECTOR PARSONS.

CONSTABLE JOHN COTTLE.

CONSTABLE ANDREW CHUGG.

MARY CLIMO.

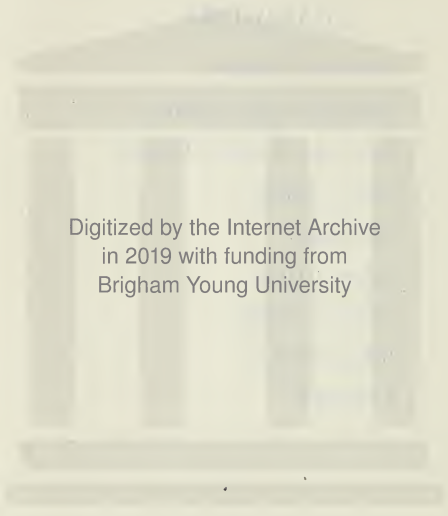
DR SHORT.

AARON CLIMO.

JENNIFER CLIMO.

JOSHUA CLIMO.

LABOURERS.



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THE MARKET-MONEY

SCENE : *Police station at the village of Holne, Dartmoor. Inspector's desk on left behind rail. A chair below it. On right a long bench and another chair. There is an entrance at back, centre, and another door, to the cells, on right. A blind is drawn down over window on left of central entrance and a gas-jet burns over Inspector's desk. Upon the front of desk and upon the walls of the police station hang notices of precautions against swine fever, of men wanted, etc. One of these sheets may have a portrait upon it.*

Inspector Parsons is writing at his desk in the box railed off on left. From outside, faintly heard, comes the grunt of a steam round-about's music. Men and women's voices are heard off and occasional laughter and whistling as people pass the police station.

[Enter G., Constable John Cottle.

PARSONS

Fair-day's gone off very nice and quiet, Cottle.

COTTLE

Oh, yes. It's always very nice and quiet in Holne—a darned sight too nice and quiet for an ambitious man, Inspector.

[Parsons laughs, shuts his book, puts down his pen and descends from his box.

COTTLE

Even on a fair-day, and gipsies and rough customers about and all, we be so orderly as a lot of sheep in a pen. Nought more than a drunk and a fight between schoolboys.

PARSONS

Yes, we're a very law-abiding folk on Dartmoor. A pity the towns don't follow our example, John.

COTTLE

All very well for you, Inspector. You've done your bit. I want to do mine. A nursemaid could do my job.

PARSONS

A very good record we've got up here. In twenty years I can't call home as we've been in the newspapers a dozen times. A few homicides, John, and a suicide now and again, but only three stark murders; and one of them was done by a foreigner from Barnstaple.

COTTLE

Well, I'm fed up. I want to go somewhere to catch the eye and get a show, and a dog's chance of promotion. I'm wasted in this place, Mr Parsons.

PARSONS

If all young men was as clever as they think they are, what a smart world it would be! 'Tis very hateful to know you'm such a

wonder, John Cottle, and can't get a chance to show it—eh ?

COTTLE

You laugh, but I suppose you felt different while you was in your prime.

PARSONS

So I did then. When I was twenty-five, I was like you—saw just exactly how to put the world right, if the old ones would only have allowed it ; and now I'm fifty-five—'tis the world that puts me right, John. The world ain't half such a fool as we think it. You did ought to read some wise books and enlarge your brain, my son.

[Voices from time to time outside and the faint blare of the steam-organ playing the same tune over and over again.]

COTTLE

I don't want no books ; I want work. I want to catch some of the damned rascals as be knocking innocent women on the head and getting away with it every time. There's something rotten at Scotland Yard—that's what I say. There's barefaced murders in every paper you open, yet the hangman don't get a job once in six months. For why ? Because nobody's ever caughted now-a-days.

PARSONS

Them be caughted that the Lord wills to be caughted.

You do your duty and mind your own business and don't be in no hurry for horrors. They'll come along. Human nature don't change. I wish it did. I felt same as you do once ; but, after forty, even a policeman would sooner neighbour along with them that keep the law than break it. You'll get your chance, however. Every bobby I ever met have had his chance soon or late.

COTTLE

I've hopes of Aaron Climo for that matter. He's drinking off and on now, and he swore yesterday that he'd do in his old Uncle Joshua ; and Bill Newte heard him. No loss if he did settle the old hunks, and might be somebody's gain.

PARSONS

You didn't ought to let your business make you bloodthirsty. That's not the right spirit, and well you know it, John.

COTTLE

You can't help seeing a storm when it's brewing. Aaron Climo always reckoned he was good for Coomber Farm, being the only relation Joshua Climo had in the world. But then Joshua took and married Mary Blee, and her a score of years younger than him, and so Aaron's number was up.

PARSONS

True ; and from that time I'm afraid he's been a

backslider. A steady enough man till lately and the prop of his old mother. 'Tis strange how hope of a dead man's shoes will keep some people straight.

COTTLE

He's lost hope now ; and if you lose hope you're done for.

PARSONS

A well-meaning chap and a very good son. Used to read the lessons in church and keep rabbits and caveys. But I'm feared for him lately. He don't go to church no more.

COTTLE

He goes to the "Church House" Inn though. Tom Chave had to deny him liquor last week. And he can't get work and his rent's behind a year, and he's like to be on the street and his mother too afore Quarter-day.

PARSONS

I know all about it, John, and very sorry I am. Only Friday last he went to his Uncle Climo at Coomber and begged for thirty-one pounds, that being the sum standing between him and his ruin at this minute. And Jennifer Climo, his mother, went with him.

COTTLE

Aaron got no change out of the old man, I'll lay.

PARSONS

He did not. Joshua gave him hell, egged him on and told him he was a disgrace to the family. Then Aaron, frantic-like, swore that, if he weren't saved from his misfortunes, he'd go forth and hang himself on the first sizable tree he came to.

COTTLE

That pleased Josh, no doubt.

PARSONS

Delighted the hard old devil. He said that Aaron was right to end his days, and he only hoped his pluck would last ; and he went so far as to offer him a new hemp rope, to help on the good work. Then Jennifer flew out and cussed Joshua to hell, and Mary Climo, Joshua's wife, took a hand also. 'Twas a very sad affair and I had it from old Jennifer after.

COTTLE

Did she tell you that her son swore, if he went out of it, he'd take good care his uncle kept him company ?

PARSONS

She did, and I told her that such horrid threats, spoke in passion, were best forgot and not repeated. Aaron ain't that sort. He's a mild-mannered man away from liquor. And, be it as 'twill, I much doubt if Joshua could

have found thirty pounds all in a minute.
Coomber Farm's a poor place.

COTTLE

Well, he's made a brave dollop of money to-day—
Joshua, I mean. He sold his wethers for a
tidy lot at the fair, and five ponies also.
Three figures it ran to, for Mary Climo told
me so, and I advised her to get Josh into his
market-cart and off home more than an hour
ago.

PARSONS

Then you're on the side of law and order after all,
John! Was he sober?

COTTLE

Oh, yes—just lively, that's all. He was putting
his hoss in the cart when I left "The Church
House."

PARSONS

Mary will drive, I reckon. 'Tis a dark night and
a rough road up to Coomber.

[A woman's cry outside; then a man's voice.]

CONSTABLE CHUGG

(Off.) Quiet, quiet, woman! Keep your head,
there's a good creature. No use bawling
about it, whatever 'tis.

*[Enter Andrew Chugg supporting Mary Climo.
She is in a distracted state, her clothes torn,
her bonnet on one side, her hair down. She*

is very lame and there is blood upon her face. Her eyes are starting out of her head and she is gasping and shaking.

PARSONS

(Going to her and supporting her.) Lord save us,
Mrs Climo! What's wrong.

CHUGG

She don't know herself what's wrong. She's
dotty.

[Voices outside and music of mouth-organ.]

PARSONS

Sit here, my dear, and calm down. *(He supports her to a chair.)* Get the brandy, John.

[Cottle fetches brandy-bottle and a glass from cupboard behind the Inspector's desk.]

MARY CLIMO

Murder—it's murder—keep him off me for God's
sake!

PARSONS

You're all right. You're safe now. Drink this—
that's it—don't you be frightened no more.
I'm here.

MARY

Murder—red murder, and I saw it—Joshua—oh,
keep him off me, Mr Parsons. *(She is hysterical and clings to the Inspector.)*

PARSONS

(*To Constable Chugg.*) Best run across for Dr Short, Andrew. He won't be to bed yet. We shan't get nought out of her till doctor's settled her down.

MARY

The devil—the hard-hearted, cruel wretch! And he'd have had me too. He lay in wait for us both—like a tiger he lay hid—

[*Exit Chugg.*

Oh, my God—wish I'd never been born afore I saw that fearful sight. I'll die of it—I'll die of it!

PARSONS

There—there. I've sent for doctor. You'm more frightened than hurt, I hope.

MARY

Me too—he was going to kill me too—he said so—and only God's mercy and my own legs saved me alive. And one of them be very near broke—Joshua's dead—he's killed him—smashed his head in—O Christ, help us!
(*Is hysterical again.*)

PARSONS

Who done it? Who's the man that done it, Missis Climo? Can you tell?

MARY

I saw him. I saw him in the light of the lantern—so plain as I see you—saw him and heard

him. He beat my husband's head in—I heard it crack, like a bone in a dog's mouth. His own nephew—his own flesh and blood.

PARSONS

Aaron Climo !

COTTLE

Where was it, Mum ? Where did it happen ?
Where did Aaron fall upon his uncle ?

MARY

To Venwill Rocks, top of the hill.

COTTLE

(*To Parsons.*) That's where he'll be then ?

PARSONS

Aye. There's the dead and the living. Joshua won't run away ; but t'other may do so. Call half a dozen chaps together. Then Chugg can take 'em along to the Rocks, and me and you will look round for the man, if so be he's home and means to bluff it on a alibi.

[*Exit Cottle.*]

MARY

He'll have me yet ! He'll have me yet, Mr Parsons. He knows he won't be safe till he's got me too. Save me from him, for your hope of heaven, and I'll pray for you for evermore.

PARSONS

We be going to, my dear ; we be going to save

you. You be quite safe now. Don't you fear nothing at all. Just pull yourself together and tell Dr Short all about it. Let down this drop of drink—there—no need to hold on to me.

MARY

Don't you leave me then.

[Enter Constable Chugg and Dr Short.]

DR SHORT

Hullo, Parsons, what's the trouble ?

PARSONS

Can't be sure yet, Doctor. But it looks like as if old Josh Climo had got it in the neck. His wife here knows, if you can get it out of her. I've got to be busy for half an hour, and I'll ax you just to calm her down and get her talking afore I come back.

DR SHORT

Why, Mrs Climo, from Coomber—so it is ! What's happened ? Get me a basin and water and a towel, Chugg.

*[Exit Chugg by door left. Voices outside.
Enter Cottle.]*

MARY

Don't you leave me, Doctor. I won't be left alone. I see his eyes a-glaring through the walls everywhere I turn.

DR SHORT

I'm not going to leave you.

PARSONS

You shan't be left a moment, Mrs Climo, not a moment. You tell doctor all about it. He'll bide along with you till we come back.

[Enter Chugg with basin and towel. Dr Short washes Mary's face and she gets better and tries to tidy herself; but she is shivering and full of distress and fear.]

PARSONS

Now, Chugg, you take them chaps outside, get the stretcher and slip it up over to Venwill Rocks so smart as you mind to. That's where the deed was done, and I'm feared you'll find Joshua Climo there in a bad way. Take liquor and your electric torch, and don't waste no time.

[Exit Chugg.]

(To Cottle.) And you and me will go down to Aaron Climo's and see his mother.

COTTLE

He may be there himself.

PARSONS

He would be there, if he'd done what he meant to do; but he'll hardly be there now, I reckon, because he knows the woman has escaped. He tried for 'em both, she says, and probably he did. But us'll hear what his mother's got to say. Take handcuffs on the chance. You never know exactly what

a man will do next, not after he's done murder. (*To Dr Short.*) I'm going to run down to Aaron Climo's cottage, Doctor. I shan't be much above ten minutes. Then you might get after Chugg and they chaps, and see if there's anything to be done for the poor chap.

[*Exit Parsons and Cottle. Cottle has taken a revolver and a pair of handcuffs from a cupboard behind the Inspector's desk.*]

MARY

(*To Dr Short.*) 'Tis no good you going to my old man and leaving me. I won't be left. Death's death, and no more harm can hap to Joshua ; but I'm at his mercy still.

DR SHORT

(*Brings second chair and sits by Mary.*) Fear nothing and tell me about it from the beginning, Mrs Climo.

[*The steam-organ grunts faintly far off.*]

MARY

All went very well with us, sir. My master sold his things at the fair and made a bit over a hundred pound by 'em, and he was only market-merry when he put the hoss in the cart. We were a bit late, because I went in to have a tell with Aaron Climo's mother and warn her that the man was saying wicked things against Joshua ; but Jennifer Climo's

took her son's side against my husband, as she always has done. We left Holne half after ten and lighted our lantern and set off. A very black night and us went slow, because our hoss is old. But my husband was in a good mood and cheerful at his great success. He were sober—that I'll swear to—but he was sleepy, and presently he gave me the reins, and I drove. We'd climbed the hill and was turning the corner by Venwill Rocks when a man jumped out on the road and got to the hoss's head ; and Joshua, who were only in a dog-sleep, felt the jolt and waked and yelled to the fellow to let go, else he'd beat him across the face with his whip. And in the flash of the lantern I see it was Aaron Climo.

DR SHORT

You can swear to that, Missis? It's an awful thing to say if you are not positive.

MARY

I can, sir, on my oath afore my Maker I can—though he looked more like a devil than a man. 'Twas Aaron Climo, white as a dog's tooth, with hell in his eyes and death in his face. But Joshua weren't frightened—nought ever frightened him. He lighted down out of the cart, and, so soon as he got to ground, the murderer was on him and flung him in the road and beat at his head. I jumped down too and dashed at Aaron ;

but he held me by my neck and very near broke it. "You wait," he said ; "your turn's coming." Oh, Jesus ! I hear him now.

DR SHORT

Threatened you too ?

MARY

Yes—"Your turn's coming," he said ; and then I see it was do or die for me, as well as poor Joshua. He meant to slay the pair of us, so as there should be no witness. I made one hugeous struggle and tore myself out of his hand ; then I ran down the hill into the moor, where 'tis all rocks and stones and fuzz. And he cussed and made after me. But I'd got a start and 'twas so black as pitch. He'd have followed the noise I made and catched me and smashed my head in no doubt, but for the blessing of God, for I went heels over head into a pit—a drain as runs down from the top of the hill—and if he'd come that way he'd have falled atop of me. Then he stopped to listen, and I bided still as still—aquott, like a hare in her form, not daring to breathe, and feeling the blood running down my face, and fearing my leg was broke. He rambled about and cursed me to hell ; then he went back up on the road, and I knew why.

DR SHORT

To be sure poor Joshua Climo was dead.

MARY

He'd made sure of that afore, sir. He hit him till I heard my husband's head go like a broke coco-nut. 'Twas for the market-money the murderer went; and I bided a bit till all was quiet, then crawled down to the river and got back up through the plantations to Holne. And very near torn to pieces afore I got there; and please God they'll take the man, else I shall never close my eyes in peace in this world no more, for he swore my turn would come.

DR SHORT

They'll take him, Mrs Climo. Have no fear for that. He hasn't got the wits to escape very long.

MARY

'Tis vain for Mister Inspector to go to his house. He won't be there.

DR SHORT

A very likely place. For then his mother can swear an alibi.

MARY

What's her word against mine?

[Voices outside.]

AARON CLIMO

(Off.) Never, Mister Inspector—never on your life!

[Enter Inspector Parsons, with Constable Cottle and Aaron Climo in handcuffs. Old

Jennifer Climo, Aaron's mother, follows. Aaron wears trousers and a shirt and boots. He has no hat and his hair is rough and his manner bewildered. There are voices outside.

PARSONS

'They ban't back, Doctor ?

DR SHORT

Not yet.

PARSONS

And have Mrs Climo come round ?

DR SHORT

Yes, yes—she's told a coherent tale. It's clear enough. (*To Mary.*) I was right, you see.

MARY

(*Glaring at Aaron.*) You bloody fiend ! Thank God they've got you red-handed.

JENNIFER

He ain't red-handed, Mary. Don't you put a rope round my boy's neck like that. He never done it.

MARY

Be I blind ? Be I deaf ? Didn't I see him kill his uncle ? Didn't he smash my husband's head in ! And wouldn't I be a deader this minute but for Heaven on my side ?

PARSONS

See if they be coming along, John.

[*Exit Cottle.*]

You can speak now, Aaron Climo. Choose your words careful, because they may be used against you. Give heed, Doctor, and don't you interrupt, old lady. (*To Jennifer.*) Your turn will come. Every man be innocent till he's proved guilty, remember.

AARON

(*Lifting his hands in his handcuffs.*) I swear afore my God to the truth of what I tell you. I've been very near down and out—I know it. I've been drinking and I've been saying as I'd do for my uncle, because he wouldn't help to save me. That's all true: I don't deny it. A score heard me. But to-day—this very day—the luck turned. I didn't go to the Fair.

MARY

I saw you there.

AARON

Aunt Mary, I can prove it. After my breakfast I said to mother that I'd try to get work yet again; and I set out to Ashburton by eight o'clock. I called at half a score of places, and at last, down to Farmer White's, at Bradley Barton, I found work. He's took me on—not for my own sake, but for mother's, because they Whites be lifelong friends of hers. And then

I came home, dog-tired and thankful to God as I was saved alive. And my mother can swear I was only out of the house after supper for an hour or less. And I came back afore eleven o'clock and went to bed.

JENNIFER

So I can then ; and that's where Inspector and John Cottle found him—in bed and asleep.

PARSONS

In bed he was ; and no sign of nought against him round about, for us looked over his clothes and so on. But this be only the beginning. There's plenty of time to get down to the truth.

MARY

'Twas between ten and eleven he murdered my husband at Venwill Rocks and promised to murder me.

AARON

You'm wrong—you'm terribly wrong, Aunt Mary. I was never out of the village.

MARY

Don't I know your face, Aaron Climo ? Didn't the lantern on the cart-shaft burn bright and clear ? Didn't you say that my turn would come after you'd killed your uncle ? And when I broke from you, didn't you run seeking me over the heath and cuss the darkness, because you couldn't lay your bloody hands upon me ?

AARON

I swear 'twas another man than me. I know nought about it.

JENNIFER

And I swear he don't, neither. Be he that sort ? Call home his peaceful life and good behaviour till he got led away by his trouble. A man as kept bees and guinea-pigs and hated to kill a chicken. A peaceful man—a church-going, good man till Joshua Climo drove him mad with his cruel tongue—a man well thought upon, as never deserved the wicked luck he got—a man who's worn out his boots for a month trying to find honest work. A good son—always a good son. A man—

[Voices silence her. The steam hurdy-gurdy drones faintly. Then a slow tramp of feet and the voices of Cottle and Chugg. The door at centre is thrown open and half a dozen labourers bring in a stretcher on which lies the body of Joshua Climo hidden under a horse-cloth.]

CHUGG

The hoss was standing in the cart five yards from the body, and Arthur Partridge have drove it home to Coomber Farm.

[They put the stretcher on the long bench. The men mop their foreheads and crowd together behind it.]

DR SHORT

Dead, Chugg ?

CHUGG

Dead as pork, Doctor. His head's broke in.

PARSONS

Didn't see nobody about ?

CHUGG

Not a sign ; but this I found beside the body.

(Gives Parsons a big pocket-book.)

MARY

That's Joshua's. He had all his money in it.

PARSONS

'Tis empty enough now, Missis.

[While Mary, Jennifer, Parsons, Cottle and Dr Short crowd over pocket-book, and in a moment of silence, there comes a strange, inarticulate sound between a grunt and a groan. The people separate so that the body under the horse-cloth is visible. They stare at it and Dr Short approaches.]

PARSONS

Was it him, Doctor ?

JENNIFER

God save us !

[The horse-cloth moves and rises into a point, as Joshua Climo sits up under it. There is a startled sound from the men looking on, and Mary, who is forgotten, puts her hand to her breast and totters. The horse-cloth falls off]

THE MARKET-MONEY

and reveals Joshua Climo. He is an old man with a bald head and grey beard but a clean shaven mouth. His head is covered with blood and his face and beard and breast also. He stares round him, then sees his wife and gets on his feet, swaying and shaking. He takes a step towards her and glares. He cannot speak but lifts his hand and points at her. His mouth opens wide and shuts, and opens again. An expression of fury convulses his face. Mary gives one horrible scream and faints, while at the same moment Joshua Climo, taking another step towards her, falls forward upon his face. Dr Short goes to him and kneels beside him, and Cottle and Chugg lift him and support him. Parsons goes to Mary.

PARSONS

(To Jennifer.) Loose her neck, Ma'am ; loose her neck and stays.

JENNIFER

Loose my son, Mister Inspector. 'Tis him you've got to loose.

PARSONS

All in good time, Mrs Climo.

[Dr Short shakes his head over Joshua Climo.]

DR SHORT

He's dead enough now—the last flash——

AARON

'Twas A'mighty God brought him back, to save me, Doctor.

[Jennifer, who has been opening Mary's dress, jumps up with a strange cry. She has removed something from inside Mary's gown and now gives it to Parsons—something from each hand. Mary recovers consciousness and sits up on the ground and stares at the dead man near her.]

PARSONS

(Holding out a handful of notes and a little bag of money.) The market-money! Oh, Mary, Mary!

[All gaze at the face of Mary Climo in silence. The organ of the round-about plays faintly.]

CURTAIN



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